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SUBJECT: WOMEN'S RIGHTS MARCHERS ARRESTED, ASSAULTED

¶1. (SBU) Police in Bulawayo brutally suppressed a demonstration of Women of Zimbabwe Arise (WOZA) on Wednesday, November 29 as the women's rights group launched their "People's Charter," a demand for social justice and affordable basic services. According to WOZA, more than 70 women were arrested; many suffered injuries, including several babies and an elderly woman. Police ultimately detained 40 WOZA members at the central police station; they were scheduled to appear in court on Friday. Access to lawyers and medical attention has reportedly been restricted. Embassy recommends the Department issue a statement condemning the Zimbabwean government's actions (see proposed text in paragraph 4).

A Peaceful Demonstration Turns into Mayhem

¶2. (U) According to WOZA, the demonstration began with 200 WOZA members in Bulawayo's city center. They began to read aloud from the "People's Charter," a document that seeks to hold government officials accountable for providing access to affordable education, housing, medical services, and other basic needs. Witnesses reported that a group of 30 police in riot gear moved into the crowd and began beating people at random. A stampede to escape ensued, during which three babies were reported to have been injured (one suffering a broken leg) and an elderly woman received a severe compound fracture of her ankle.

¶3. (U) Police reportedly took 51 demonstrators to a nearby police camp where they were beaten and then released. Another 40 WOZA members, including six babies, have been held for two days at the central police station where access to legal assistance and medical attention was restricted. Those

arrested were to appear before a magistrate in Bulawayo on Friday on charges under the Criminal Law Act of disturbing the peace and participating in a public gathering with the intention of causing public disorder.

Proposed Statement

¶4. (SBU) Embassy recommends that Washington issue a statement condemning GOZ actions in suppressing the demonstration. Proposed text follows:

On November 29, Zimbabwean police used violence to breakup a peaceful demonstration of Women of Zimbabwe Arise (WOZA) and to arrest more than 40 WOZA members. The United States condemns the Zimbabwean government's brutal reaction to this peaceful effort of Zimbabwean citizens to exercise their rights. We call for the immediate release of those still detained, for access to legal assistance, and for access to medical treatment for those who were injured.

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